What Is There In Mandal Recommendations?

From Naresh 'Nadeem'

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BACKGROUND OF THE REPORT

The Commission was appointed in 1978 by the then Janata Party regime to go into the question of job reservations for what are known as the Other Backward Classes. The term covers all those sections of society, other than the scheduled castes and tribes, which are economically, socially and educationally backward. The need for reservations for such groups was felt for a long time, as the recommendations of the earlier Kaka Kalelkar Commission, constituted in 1953 and which submitted its report in 1955, had gone unimplemented for about a quarter of a century, under the benign regime of the Congress party. The main recommendation of the earlier Commission was for a 33 per cent job quota for the OBCs.

The situation deteriorated so much that the OBCs which constitute about 52 per cent of the country's population, had come to have a less than five per cent share in the jobs under the Central and State Governments, public sector undertakings and nationalised banks. On the other hand, the upper castes who are less than 20 per cent in the population, commanded about 70 per cent of the IAS and IPS posts and 52 per cent PCS jobs.

It was in this situation that the Mandal Commission was constituted to go into the question of job quotas for the OBCs. The latter submitted its report in 1980, after the electoral come-back of the Congress(I). The pundits of the Congress(I) are today very vocal in assuring that it was their Government which extended the period of the Mandal Commission, thereby enabling it to submit its report. However, what they conveniently gloss over, rather unsuccessfully, is that, as in case of the earlier recommendations, they sat tight over the Mandal report as well for one precious decade.

The net result of this contradiction between the words and deeds of the Congress party has been that about three-fourths of the Indian people (52 per cent OBCs plus 22.5 per cent SCs and STs) continue to remain backward even after four decades of independence. If we add to this the poorer people from the upper castes, the number of those needing institutionalised help from the Government will go bebond 80 per cent of the total population. Moreover, this backwardness is a product of the highly inegalitarian social order in India which has been a legacy of several millenia.

NEED FOR RESERVATIONS

The Mandal Commission started its work at a time when a bitter caster war was raging in some parts of the country, particularly in Bihar, over the issue of reservations for the OBCs, and "fight for equality" was being used as a watchword for defence of the privileges of the few better-off people. It was in this background that the Commission made the following bitter remark:

> ***In fact the Hindu society has always operated as very rigorous scheme of reservation, which was internalised through the caste system. Eklavya lost his thumb and Shambuk his neck for their breach of caste rules of reservation. The present furore against reservations for OBCs is not aimed at the principle itself, but against the new class of beneficiaries, as they are now clamouring for a share of the opportunities which were all along monopolised by the higher castes (para 13.9)***

Indeed, it was this traditional system of reservations, as codified in the *Manusmriti*, that conrnered all the benefits for the upper castes and prohibited the Shudras from acquiring any learnig or wealth, or even leaving their respective vllages lest that might deprive the idle masters of working hands.

While recommending steps for undoing, to an extent, this tranditional system of reservations, the Mandal Commission is clear about two things. Firstly, in order to do so, a system of reservations in, so to say, the inverse direction has to be introduced. This is what is sometimes called "protective discrimination", and formed the hard core of the Gandhi-Ambedkar talks in the thirties. Secondly, the Commission views reservations as no panacea for the problems facing the backwards, and certainly not as a solution to the galloping unemployment problem, it is clear that the real significance of reservations lies somewhere else, and also that more radical measures are required to tackle the basic problems facing the bulk of Indian humanity. Both these aspects, characterising the Commission's report as nothing else does, will be dealt with later.

Replying to various objections to the policy of reservations, on the plea of merit, limited utility of the job quota, and a possibility of the better-off sections cornering benefits of the reservations, etc., the Mandal Commission admits that the offer of a few thousands jobs to the OBCs will not "make 52 per cent of the Indian population forward." However, "an essential part of the battle against social backwardness is to be fought in the minds of the backward people." As Government jobs are considered in India "a symbol of prestige and power," job quotas for the OBCs would "give them an immediate feeling of participation in the goverance of this country."

This contention of the Commission, going by the experience of four decades of reservations for the scheduled castes and tribes, appears to be a bit exaggerated, as an overwhelming majority of these sections have still not acquired "a sense of participation in running the affairs of the country." However, reservations to give the hitherto-deprived sections a certain amount of self-esteem and self-confidence, and a lever to enable them to compete with others on a less-unequal-than-earlier footing.

SUGGESTED SCHEME

It is from this angle that the Commission, in view of the Supreme Court ceiling of 50 per cent on servations and 22.5 per cent already carved out for the Scheduled castes and tribes, suggested a quota of 27 per cent for the OBCs, "both Hindu and non-Hindu," (para 13.11). In this context, the Commission makes the following recommendations—

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(v) A roster system for each category of posts in the same manner as for SC and ST candidates. (para T3.13)

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RESERVATIONS IN EDUCATION

Educational reform was not actually included in the terms of reference given to the Mandal Commission. But, by the sheer logic of the phenomenon, the Commission was compelled to make certain recommendations for OBC quotas in educational institutions. This logic is not difficult to understand. Unless the deprived sections are enabled to get the same kind of education as is available to the privileged sections, whatever quota in jobs is earmarked for them, is bound to remain unfulfilled, as the four-decade long bitter experience of reservations for SC and ST population suggests. The Commission is very explicit in this regard. It says that the elitist character of our education has resulted in a high degree of wastage when no job is available at the end of the education, and "least suited to the needs of backward classes" (para 13.18) who, more than others, just cannot afford such a high wastage of years and money invested, and which also strains national resources. The Commission therefore suggests that in place of piecemeal concessions like tuition fee exemptions, free textbooks, etc., what is required "is, perhaps, not so much the privision of additonal funds, as the creation of integrated schemes for creating the proper environment and incentives for serious and purposeful studies" (para 13. 19).

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A specific case pinpointed by the Mandal Commission is that of traditional vocational communities like the village potters, cobblers and shoe-makers, oil crushers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and so on, who "have suffered heavily as a result of industrialisation". As a result of "machanical production and introduction of synthetic materials" (para 13.17), they have been robbed of their means of livelihood and paupetised. Incidentally, most of these sections belong to the OBCs or scheduled castes.

Indeed, pauperisation of these sections because of the bankrupt path of capitalist development, is a well-known phenomenon, and the Mandal commission has made welcome recommendations for helping these communities in their distress like "suitable institutional finance and technical assistance" for setting up small units of their own, separate financial corporations for them, cooperative societies of occupational groups run by the concerned people themselves without any outsider infiltration.

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(on Page Ten)

Mandal Recommendations—

(from Page Four)

and setting up of a "separate network of financial and technical insitutions to foster business and industrial enterprise among OBCs", (para 13.28 to 13.32). This is a near-class approach on part of the Commission, and one can only say that all these measures must also cover the non-OBCs which are suffering from similar deprivatisations.

STRUCTUAL CHANGES

However, the Commission is duly aware of the fact that all these measures "will remain mere palliatives unless the problem of backwardness is tackled at its root" (para 13.32). The Commission takes note of the fact that the bulk of the rural toilers and unskilled workers belong to the SC and OBC categories—the same thing which some sociologists have termed as "caste-class correspondence". Hence the Commission emphatically suggests that "unless the stranglehold of the existing production relations is broken through radical land reforms, the abject dependence of under-privileged classes on the dominant higher castes will continue indefinitely" (para 13. 33). According to the Commission, moreover, "Even if this is not possible in the industrial sector for various reasons, in the agricultural sector a change of this nature is both feasible and overdue" (para 13.34). In fact, the Commission has, in this regard, gone on to quote the example of Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal which have done "the job more earnestly (and) have not only succeeded in materially helping the backward classes, but also reaped rich political dividends in the bargain" (para 13.33).

Written as far back as 1980, this is a very significant observation on the part of the Commission. Since then, much water has flowed under the bridge, particularly in case of West Bengal where the problem now does not exist in the same form or intensity and where the backward classes have acquired a new mode of life becaue of radical land and political reforms. If only B.P. Mandal had been alive today, he would have had no reason to repent his observation!

In this regard, the Commission has "strongly" recommended that "all the State Governments should be directed to enact and implement progressive land legislations so as to effect basic structural changes in the existing production relations in the countryside" (para 13. 35), and allotment of some ceiling-surplus land, apart from those allotted to the SC and ST people, to the "OBC landless labour" (para 13.36).

The Commision also makes certain recommendations for special groups, like inclusion of fishermen, *banjars*, etc., currently regarded as OBCs into the SC list as they suffer from the *stigma* of untouchability; separate constituencies for very backward sections of OBCs like Gaddis in Himachal Pradesh, Neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra, etc., and separate Ministries or Departments for OBCs as well as Backward Classes Development Corporations at the Central and State levels.

CENTR-STATE RELATIONS

The last major aspects which the Commission has touched upon is that of Centre-State relations even though this terminology has not been used in the chapter on recommendations. During the tour of various States, the Commission found that the States had to spend from their own funds for welfare measures for the OBCs, it will be beyond the availabe resources of the States to undertake any worthwhile programme" for OBC's welfare (para 13. 38).

This really speaks of a pathetic state of the Centre-State relations in which the States are expected to implement various constitutional and other obligations without having adequate resources to do so. In view of this, the Commission, as it "fully shares the views of the State Governments in this matter", has "strongly' recommended that all programmes for OBC welfare" be financed by the Central Government in the same manner and to the same extent as done in the case of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes" (para 13.39). This is indeed a very democratic demand.

Finally, the Commission has opined that the entire scheme should be reviewed after 20 years, as this is the period in which a whole generation will come up under the impact of the these provisions. The Commission feels that any review at a shorter interval would not be able to give "a fair indication' of the impact to these recommendations on "the prevailing status and life styles of the OBCs."

ECONOMIC CRITERIA

These then constitute the Mandal Commission's recommendations contained in Chapter 13 of its report, in almost the same sequence as in the report. Going by these recommendations, one can infer that they reflect, by and large, the major democratic demands of the Indian people, even though they suffer here and there from minor flaws. Hence the need to properly process the report, strengthen its democratic content and implement them in a through manner.

One serious drawback of the report is that it does not recognise that many of the problems it has delineated are not particular to the OBCs alone. Certainly, the OBCs have certain specific problems of their own and they need to be addressed to, but most of their demands, and hence the Mandal recommendations, are applicable to all toiling people irrespective of caste. Looked at from another angle, even though the caste-class correspondence mentioned above, is; to an extent, intact particularly, in the countryside, it is not an absolute phenomenon. During the last four decades, while a good chunk of the OBC families have moved up in the socio-economic ladder, at the same time, many non-OBCs too have joined the ranks of paupers. This calls for the introduction of economic creteria while implementing these recommendations, so that only the really needy among the OBCs get the benefits of reservations.

The Commission is well aware of this problem: "It is no doubt true that the major benefits of reservations and other welfare measures for Other Backward Classes will be cornered by the more advanced sections of the backward communities." However, the Commission wants to evade the problem by the queer query: "But is it not a unviersal phenomenon?", and goes on to sermonise: "All reformist remedies have to contend with a slow recovery along the hierarchical gradient; there are no quantum jumps in social reform. Moreover, human nature being what it is, a "new class" ultimately does emerge even in classless societies," (para 13. 7).

Evidently, the Commission appears to have been too much influenced by the viewpoint of the better-off among the OBCs who want to keep the benefits reserved for their posterity as well—even after having moved up economically and educationally! It is, perhaps, to conceal this bias that the Commission takes recourse to the theory of a supposedly immutable "human nature" and the like. But, who is ultimately going to be harmed by such reasoning? Evidently, it will be those among the OBCs who are not so well-off.

The introduction of economic criteria is necessary to guard against this possibility. (Tragically, the recommendations nowhere take account of the 1978 Karpoori Thakur fomula implemented in Bihar, which have appealed not only to the OBCs but to the wider demoratic sections as well.) This step is absolutely necessary to safeguard, among other things, the democratic movement from disruption.

However, this factor must not blind one to the overall democratic character of the Mandal recommendations, and those who have been opposing it on the spur of the moment, would be well advised to go through and ponder over these recommendations. They will, hopefully, find that these recommendations contain much which, if seriously implemented, would contribute to a restructuring of our whole system along more democratic and egalitarian lines—a development which surely our young students would not oppose. The question today cannot be to defend the traditional privileges of a few, but to strive for a society in which privileges become altogether unnecessary. A study of the Mandal recommendations with a view to overcoming its weaknesses and strengthening its positve contents, would go a long way in the direction of providing the jobs and kind of future which our students aspire to.

JUST PUBLISHED

Caste, Politics and the Raj : Bengal 1872-1937

by

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

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The present study explores the mental world of certain lower caste people and examines the experiences, perceptions and ideas that shaped their attitude to colonial rule vis-a-vis nationalism. It shows how a new social catagory called and 'depressed classes' was constructed by the colonial sociological discourse and was subsequently politicised by the policy of protective discrimination. As their grivances and aspirations were not accommodated within the mainstream of nationalist politics, 'caste' appeared to them as the most ligitimate reference category for social agglomeration and their integration into the 'Nation' was delayed.

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Harmony Marches In Patna, Karnal

AT Patna, a huge Sadbhavana March was taken out to the State Assembly building on October 29, a day before the D-Day forced upon the nation by the RSS-BJP-VHP combine. The march, joined by a large number of people from various strata, moved through the J.P. Chowk, Bhagat Singh Chowk, Ashok Rajpath, and other places, and reached the Gandhi Ghat in one and a half hours time, covering a distance of six km.

Prominent among those joining the march were L.P. Yadav, the Bihar Chief Minister, Ram Sundar Das (Janata Dal), Ganesh Shankar Vidayarthi of the CPI(M), Suraj Prasad (CPI), Suraj Mandal (JMM), U.S. Shukla (MCC), N.K. Mahto (F.B.), T.K. Prakash (RSP), K.N. Dubey (RCPI), Shankar Singh (SUCI) and Ramakant of the Congress(S).

After hailing the arrest of L.K. Advani at Samastipur, the speakers expressed satisfaction that the spread of communal virus has been contained in the State. They urged upon the toiling sections and the intelligentsia and intellectuals to move into action to foil the game of communal forces.

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In Karnal in Haryana also, a Communal Harmony March was taken out by hundreds of people, including a large number of women, at the call of the CPI(M). Those who led the march included veteran freedom-fighter Baba Ajit Singh Bedi.

The campaign for communal harmony began on October 21 when a joint convention with the CPI, attended by 250 persons, was held. Between October 23 and 30, the CPI(M) workers held over 50 well-attended meetings in various colonies and markets. They got their reward in form of an attack on October 25 evening in Ram Nagar by some enraged BJP hooligans led by Municipal Councillor, Jai Ram.

CPI(M) Memorandum to Chief Secretary

Urgent Steps Needed To Safeguard Communal Amity

ON November 5, a delegation of CPI(M) leaders met the Chief Secretary, Tripura, and placed a memorandum on the mischievous activities of the BJP and a section of the Congress(I), to disturb the communal amity prevailing in the State, following the communal disturbances that have taken place in various parts of the country in the wake of the BJP's Rathyatra.

A number of concrete instances have been cited in the memorandum where deliberate attempts were made to either raise tension, create panic, or instigate a clash. Among them were the following:

On the night of October 29, some miscreants set on fire an abandoned ralibari at N.C. Nagar, predominantly a Muslim village under Sonamura sub-division, though these evil designs of the criminals were thwarted by the peace-loving people of the locality.

A conspiracy was hatched to destroy a Masjid at Chitaldah in Bishnupur village under Choraibari Police Station, which was brought to the notice of the SDO, Dharmanagar on October 30.

On November 1, some Congress(I) supporters set up a 'Ramshila' in front of kusharara Masjid under Udaipur, and started worshipping there, creating panic among the people.

The same night some miscreants demolished the Indo-Bangladesh border pillar about one km north-west of Kalamchara village under Sonamura sub-division, and hoisted the national flag of Bangladesh inside India.

Also on the same night a Masjid was set ablaze at Garji under udaipur sub-division. People from all walks of life came forward to extinguish the fire. The next day, the SDPO Udaipur went there and the Chairman of the Waqf Board, Dr. Kari, submitted an FIR, wherein no name was specified. Despite this the SDPO on his own arrested Netai Biswas, Secretary of the CPI(M) local committee, and Sankar Das, a local committee member and brought them to the police station. On hearing the news of their arrest, people, irrespective of political affiliation, rushed to the police station to express their indignation and demand the unconditional release of the detained persons. Even Dr. Kari who had filed the FIR came to the station to demand their release. They were left off later that night. It should be noted that these CPI(M) leaders and other workers have been organising meetings to maintain communal harmony in the locality. It is the maintain communal harmony in the locality. It is thus clear that a section of the police, instead of arresting the troublemakers, are arresting those who are working for maintaining communal harmony all along.

On November 2, the BJP and a section of the Congress(I) organised a 'Hindu Maha Sammelan' at Childrens' Park at Dharmanagar town, where one after the other the speakers, made highly provocative speeches. After the conference, a group of them started a search for the minority people of the town, and attacked Md. Rakib Ali, a day-labourers of Sakaibari village, near Maya Cinema Hall, inflicting serious injury on him.

On the 3rd, when a DYFI member of Tongibari under Dharmanagar sub-division Paul, was going to his relatives' house, some miscreants abused him with remarks like 'pet dogs of CPI(M) and Muslims'. When Pal protested he was attacked with sticks and choppers, causing him serious injury. The miscreants are known Congress(I) supporters.

At about mid-night of the same day, some miscreants set on fire the 'Madrasa School' at charipara under Antali P.S. in Sadar subdivision, again giving rise to fear and tension among the minority community.

As a result of the communal disturbances in various parts of India, some communal disturbances in neighbouring Bangladesh are reported to have taken place, and it would appear that some people of the minority community have already started taking shelter in our State, and a further influx is apprehended.

No culprits have been arrested to date, and one does not see any measures taken by Government so far to stop the activities of these criminals, out to create communal disturbances. Further write-ups and reports of a daily local paper, 'Dainik Sambad' are also helping the communal forces.

DEMANDS

In the circumstances the signatories to the memorandum have demanded that:

1. The Government must take adequate security measures to protect all the mosques and madrasas of the State.
2. The Government must make elaborate security arrangements to guard all the Muslim minority villages.
3. The miscreants who are playing wild pranks in instigating religious feelings must be identified and punished.
4. The Indo-Bangladesh border must be immediately sealed.
5. The Bangladeshi nationals who have entered the State must be identified, and shelter provided to them in camps.
6. The Government must take appropriate steps to maintain communal harmony and assuage the felling of the panic-stricken minority people.
7. The District Magistrates and Collectors should convene all party meetings at sub-divisional levels in order to maintain peace and harmony.
8. Adequate security arrangements must also be made for the protection of the tribal minority.

The Chief Secretary assured the three member delegation comprising Samar Choudhury, Badal Choudhury and Khagen Das, that the Government would issue instructions to District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police to take appropriate steps where necessary, and instruction would also be given to D.M.'s and S.P.'s to convene sub-divisional-level all-parties' meetings in this respect; that in relation to making arrangements for repair of damaged mosques and madrasas, and houses of the minority community, the matter would be looked into sympathetically, the BSF would be alerted to prevent further influx of refugees from Bangladesh.

With regard to future sefeguarding of the minorities and mosques and madrasa, he replied that although the security forces are inadequate he would issue instructions to the appropriate authority in this respect. The editorials and write-ups in *Dainik Sambad* which are posing a threat to the communal harmony, would be looked into as alsoan appeal made in general to the Press and other media to help the Government maintain communal harmony.

The Chief Secretary expressed his appreciation for the valuable suggestions to maintain peace and harmony in the State, made by the CPI(M).

CORRECTION

1). In *People's Democracy*, November 4 issue, in the second paragraph on p. 3, "Congress(I)" has been inadvertently printed in place of "Congress (S)".

2). In November 11 issue, in the overflow of the article on Mandal recommendations on p. 10, in the first paragraph under the caption "Centre-State Relations", some lines have inadvertently been left out. The para should read as below:

"The last major aspect which the Commission has touched upon is that of Centre State relations even though this terminology has not been used in the chapter on recommendations. During its tour of various States, the Commission found that the States had to spend from their own funds for welfare measures for the OBCs, and were not receiving any Central assistance whatsoever on this item. Moreover, "practically every State Government pointed out that unless the Centre is prepared to liberally finance all special schemes for the upliftment of OBCs, it will be beyond the available resources of the States to undertake any worhwhile programme" for the OBCs' welfare (para 13.38).

3). In the photo printed on front page of November 4 issue, the portion showing Mulkraj Anand has been inadvertently deleted.

The errors are regretted.

Editorial—

(from Front Page)

knows. Yet he staked his claim to Prime Ministership as an alternative leadership, and was made the Prime Minister without any known political solutions or pledges, which also means he is not technically accountable for anything. And all this is apart from the fact that he has no mandate anyway.

For all these evils and the unhealthy situation besetting the country today, the Congress(I) is squarely responsible. Whether Chandra Shekhar wants it or not, his deal with the Congress(I) is bound to see him implementing the same disastrous policies of Rajiv Gandhi. However much he may give the air of solving these issues in an independent and new way, the fact remains that his is a party of 50 MPs joined to the bandwagon of 190 MPs of the Congress(I). Even a fool should understand that leaves little room to manoeuvre.

Already in Rajasthan his MLAs have joined hands with the BJP to bolster a BJP Government there. So there goes the Janata Dal (Socialist)'s secularism and anti-communalism. And there is nothing surprising in this. The logic is that one unprincipled alliance must lead to more sinister and still worse alliances. This is the path that Chandr Shekhar has chosen to trend.

But he should remember that it is a downhill and slippery road. The more he travels downhill, the greater the momentum he will acquire. There is a law of gravity even in the affairs of men.

Thus India now has the dubious fame of a Government at the Centre of defectors, by-defectors and for defectors. The people of this country who barely a year ago, so consciously and vehemently rejected the Congress(I) Government at the Centre have been cheated, their victory stolen away from them, their years of struggle since 1980 despoiled.

From November 21 onwards the Janata Dal and the Left will start going to the people. We have absolutely no doubt that the struggle ahead will rouse the people on a more gigantic scale than it did in 1989. In the final analysis, the people are always the ultimate arbiter. To this court of the people, the Left and secular elements have decided to make their appeal. In the last two decades, time and again, it has been shown that defectors' governments are no more than freaks and not tolerated by the unlettered maybe, but extremely astute masses of our people. This time is not going to be an exception either.

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